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from the minds of your eminences, and of every Catholic Christian, this vehement suspicion rightfully entertained towards me, with a sincere heart and unfeigned faith I abjure, curse, and detest the said errors and heresies, and generally every other error and sect contrary to the said Holy Church; and I swear that I will never more in future say or assert anything verbally, or in writing, which may give rise to a similar suspicion of me; but if I shall know any heretic, or any one suspected of heresy, that I will denounce him to this Holy Office, or to the inquisitor and ordinary of the place in which I may be. I swear, moreover, and promise, that I will fulfil and observe fully all the penances which have been, or shall be, laid on me by this Holy Office. But, if it shall happen that I violate any of my said promises, oaths, and protestations (which God avert!), I subject myself to all the pains and punishments which have been decreed and promulgated by the sacred canons, and other general and particular constitutions, against delinquents of this description. So may God help me, and His Holy Gospels, which I touch with my own hands. I, the above named Galileo Galilei, have abjured, sworn, promised, and bound myself, as above, and in witness thereof with my own hand have subscribed this present writing of my abjuration, which I have recited word for word. At Rome, in the Convent of Minerva, 22nd June, 1633. I, Galileo Galilei, have abjured as above with my own hand."

(To be continued.)

THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

THAT it is the duty of Christian people to examine the grounds of their religion and faith, and not to take them upon trust, constitutes one of the fundamental principles of Protestantism which most widely separate it from the Church of Rome. It is, in fact, only another form of stating the principle of the right of Private Judgment. And as there is hardly any of the points at issue between Protestants and Roman Catholics about which more misconception and misrepresentation have prevailed than this one of the right of Private Judgment, we think it may be useful to offer a few considerations on the subject. Our object shall be as well to establish this right on the basis of reason and of Scripture as to obviate the misconceptions and to expose the misrepresentations by which its true import has been obscured and perverted. The subject, we need not add, is one of very great importance, and, therefore, we would invite the calm and serious attention of our Roman Catholic readers to the following remarks.

First, then, as to the *reason of the case*. It requires but little argument to prove that a being endowed by God with the noblest of all His gifts—an immortal soul—is responsible to Him for the proper use of the faculties with which that soul has been furnished. Of these faculties, reason and conscience are the chief. Every individual man is endowed with them, and, therefore, every man is individually accountable for them. The responsibility which he incurs in virtue of them he cannot transfer to any other man, or to any society of men, because it is a *personal* matter; it is a transaction between him and his Maker, in which no other creature has a right to meddle, and to which he himself has no right to admit any other creature to be a party. Now, the proper use, so far as regards religion, of the faculty of reason obviously is to endeavour to find out, by all available means, whatever may be known concerning God's nature, His will respecting us, and the most acceptable mode of rendering to Him worship and service. If a system of religion be proposed to us which professes to impart the necessary information on these points, our duty as plainly is to examine to the utmost of our ability the grounds on which its authority rests. And if we have reasonably satisfied ourselves that it really is what it claims to be, then we are bound in reason to adopt it as our own. And should there be more than one such system of religious belief prevalent in the world, each claiming to be itself the true one, we cannot acquit ourselves of our responsibility to God without investigating their respective claims, and, before we give in our adhesion to any of them, reasonably satisfying ourselves both as to their absolute and relative truth. In carrying on this inquiry, our reason is the proper judge of the *external evidence* by which the advocates of each system endeavour to prove that what they hold is a revelation from God. It is also to some extent a judge of the *consistency* of the different parts of the system with each other, and of its conformity with the moral nature which God has implanted within us; that is to say, our reason cannot accept as a divine revelation any system which contains plain contradictions or inculcates manifest immoralities. It is in the latter inquiry, that, viz., connected with the morality of the system, that our conscience must be consulted and plays its proper part. Our responsibility to God, then, as rational beings, endowed with reasoning faculties and moral instincts, absolutely demands that our religious belief should be based upon a *reasonable conviction* that what we believe is true. It is not enough reasonably to satisfy us of the truth of our creed that our fathers have held it before us. For, on this ground a Mahometan would be just as acceptable in God's sight as the most devoted servant of Jesus. Nor is it enough that the religion of our forefathers should be able to plead antiquity in its favour, and trace itself back for hundreds or thousands of years. For, were this the case, the votaries of the revolting superstitions of India would be right in rejecting the religion of the Cross. Nor, again, is it safe and right for a man to acquiesce without inquiry in whatever the spiritual guides under whom he finds himself placed may declare to be true. For, on this principle, the idolatry into which the ancient people of God were from

time to time led, by their apostate high priests or false prophets, might be justified. On the same principle, the Jews who rejected and crucified the Redeemer might be justified; because they did that for which they had the authority of their High Priest and Sanhedrim. The same principle would have justified them afterwards in rejecting the Christian doctrine, and persecuting the Apostles and other first preachers of it. The same principle would also have effectually hindered the propagation of Christianity among the heathen, whose spiritual guides were, as a class, naturally opposed to it. In short, unless we admit the principle that every man is responsible to God for his creed, and that it is, consequently, his duty no less than his right to satisfy himself as to the reasonable grounds of his faith, and not to take them simply upon trust, we shall arrive at the monstrous conclusion that all religions are equally good, and that a man may be saved out of the Church of Christ as certainly as in it.

The reason of the case, then, being altogether in favour of the Protestant principle of the right and duty of private judgment in religion, let us next consider what Scripture says upon the subject. The testimony of Scripture is so explicit and decisive, that it is only a wonder how any one who admits its authority at all can for a moment dispute the point. Were the Bible more generally and carefully read by Roman Catholics than, unfortunately, it is, we have no doubt that such considerations as the following must have presented themselves to many of them, at least, with irresistible force. Our blessed Lord addressed to the people at large such of His discourses as were not purposely designed for His disciples alone. He assumes the multitude to be competent to judge of His arguments in support of the new revelation which He came to communicate, and against the false system which their authorized spiritual guides had engrained on the former revelation made by God to Moses and the prophets. He nowhere countenances for a moment the notion of a blind and implicit acquiescence in the established system of religion, merely because it was taught and enforced by the supreme religious Council of the nation. On the contrary, in the Sermon on the Mount, and elsewhere, He points out and condemns some of the spurious additions which they made to the written Law, and some of the false interpretations which they put upon it, and openly accuses them of having made void the law of God through their traditions. He did not merely assert all this in virtue of His authority as a teacher sent from God, but He actually appealed to the reason and judgment of His auditory, and remonstrated with them for not making use of their judgment—"And why even of yourselves do you not judge that which is just?"—(Luke xii. 57, Douay version.) The Apostles also in their teaching imitate in this respect the example of their Divine Master. St. Paul expressly commands his Thessalonian converts to "Prove all things," and to "hold fast that which is good."—1 Thess. v. 21. This epistle was addressed, not to the bishops and governors only of the Church at Thessalonica, but to the whole "Church of the Thessalonians," as we find in ch. i. 1. And we may observe in general that the Epistles in the New Testament are, for the most part, addressed to the whole body of the faithful. Thus, we read, Rom. i. 7, "To all that are at Rome, the beloved of God, called to be saints." Again, 1 Cor. i. 2, "To the Church of God that is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place of their: and ours." Again, Gal. i. 2, "To the Churches of Galatia." Again, Eph. i. 1, "To all the saints who are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus." Again, Col. i. 1, "To the saints and faithful brethren who are at Colossæ." And it is remarkable that when the bishops and other ministers of the Church are specially named, the whole body of the faithful are not forgotten. Thus, Phil. i. 2, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus, who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." It is only his pastoral epistles (those to Timothy and Titus) that St. Paul directs to the governors of the Church, because his object in them is to give particular directions respecting Church government and discipline. In all other cases, with the exception of the private letter to Philemon, he addresses the whole body of Christian believers. The same is true of the remaining epistles of the New Testament.

Thus, then, our blessed Lord and His inspired Apostles not only recognise the right and duty of Private Judgment in matters of religion, but in all their teaching they assume it as a fundamental principle.

We now proceed to notice some of the *misconceptions and misrepresentations* which prevail respecting this right of Private Judgment in religion, and which have embarrassed the subject with much needless difficulty, and given occasion to many unfounded objections.

It has been taken for granted by some weak-minded persons, and the idea has been seized hold of and perseveringly insisted on by Roman Catholic controversialists, that the Protestant principle of the right of Private Judgment asserts an *absolute and unlimited licence* for individual opinion about all questions connected with religion. Nothing can be more remote from truth than this idea. Like all natural rights, the right of Private Judgment has its corresponding duties, obligations, and restrictions. Every man, to take an illustration, has a natural right to whatever may be essential to his existence and well-being. But this right does not entitle him to kill or rob his neighbor in order to supply his own wants. The duties which

he owes to God and to his fellow-man limit the exercise of his abstract right of self-preservation; and if he disregards the limitation, he becomes justly obnoxious to the penalties exacted against homicide and robbery. Again, every man claims the general right to do what he wishes with himself and his own property. But this abstract claim does not justify him in committing suicide, or slowly destroying himself by intemperance, or spending his money in practices injurious to other individuals, or to society at large. And so, in like manner, the natural right of Private Judgment in religion is not absolute and unconditional, but is limited and restrained by duties and obligations quite as natural and quite as essential as the right itself. There is, for example, the primary duty of a reverential regard for God's revealed Word, when known to be His; and of humble acquiescence in whatever it makes known, however startling to human reason or distasteful to corrupt human nature. There is also the duty of a jealous distrust of the conclusions of reason when it speculates about things beyond the sphere of natural knowledge, and respecting which Scripture is either wholly silent or studiously reserved. There is, again, the duty of a prayerful study of the Bible, aided and directed, as far as possible, by all the additional light thrown upon it by human learning and research. There is, moreover, the duty of respectful attention and deference to the interpretations of Scripture current in the Church from the primitive ages, and embodied in her creeds and other formularies:—an attention and deference not excluding the right of examining these interpretations, and testing their conformity to the Word of God, but causing the examination to be conducted in a sober and earnest spirit. When the right of Private Judgment is controlled and directed by a proper regard to these fundamental duties and obligations, there is no fear that it will degenerate into that wild license of opinion with which it has been most erroneously and unjustly confounded. The accusations, therefore, and objections which Roman Catholic divines bring against the principle of Private Judgment, as leading to unbridled license of opinion, are founded on an utter misrepresentation of what that principle really imports. The charge may apply to the wild and licentious rationalism of Germany, but they wholly miss their aim when directed against genuine Protestantism.

We hope to resume this subject in our next number, when we shall expose some other misrepresentations of this principle, and answer the objections based upon them.

PSEUDO-MIRACLES.

It is really refreshing to us, as lovers of truth and haters of imposture in any shape, to see a publication like the *Rambler*, with which, in many things, we differ so much, boldly coming forward to expose "pious frauds" and "pious credulity," as productive, as they really are, of deadly mischief to the cause of religion; and not only expressing disbelief in some of the most successful modern ecclesiastical miracles, but actually bringing forward remarkable instances of the recent detection of others, as a warning to be wary in giving credence to such pretensions in future.

The *Rambler* for last month, in an article "On belief in reputed miracles" (p. 290), contains, among others, the following very wholesome and important positions:—

1st. That to suppose that it indicates a "pious" mind to be disposed to believe in every miraculous report which may have been spread, before the process of investigation has taken place, is a dangerous error, and contrary to the most elementary principles of all reasoning. "Because a thing may happen, we are not justified in believing that it *probably* will happen."

When the Catholic proceeds to the detailed examination of each case individually, he cannot forget that the question before him is purely and entirely one of human testimony.

His bias, whether for or against a report, previous to his examination, is determined by his knowledge of the average value of similar reports in cases which have been investigated.

He knows that, as a rule, experience shows that out of six reports of supernatural agency five usually prove incorrect, he approaches the investigation of any fresh one with the recollection of the past before his mind, and he holds that the chance is five to one against this new case until it is inquired into. The whole question before him is one of fact—of external, visible, physical fact—to be determined by the same laws of evidence which would determine the reality of any supernatural fact, where there was no question of the supernatural at all involved. The circumstance that it is his duty will call forth the profoundest expressions of devotion and love to God does not, in the least, affect the value of the evidence whether it is true. He is not concerned with the acts of Almighty God at all, until the examination is concluded; he is concerned only with man, and his capacities for giving correct evidence in cases of the description before him. Nor has he any right to allow his judgment to be warped by his wish to find the supposed miracle a real miracle. The question, what he would like Almighty God to have done ought not to bias him in his inquiries as to what God has done. God is Himself the only Judge when a miracle shall be wrought, and of what kind it shall be; and for us, when we hear it said that such and such a marvel is reported, to jump to the conclusion that, most likely, it is true,